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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE GROUP
INTELLIGENCE REPORT

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COUNTRY Turkey

DATE: 25X1A6a

SUBJECT Request of Turkish Deputies for Religious Instruction

INFO. [REDACTED]

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DIST. 22 March 1947

PAGES 2

SUPPLEMENT

ORIGIN [REDACTED]

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1. A growing sentiment in Turkey that the lack of religious instruction is leading to a disintegration of morals, particularly among the younger generation, was voiced in the Grand National Assembly by two deputies of the Republican People's Party, Hamdullah Suphi Tanriöver and Muhittin Baha Pars, during the debate on the budget of the Ministry of Public Instruction.
2. Deputy Muhittin Baha Pars pointed out that the void left in the minds of the younger generation by the misguided policy of laicism pursued by the government was in danger of being filled by nefarious religions and theories. He added that in order to combat this threat, the Turks should return to the religion of Islam, and while it was certainly not necessary to tolerate any interference of selfish religious interests in their relations with the state, this was no reason for leaving the people without religious instruction. He continued by saying that if Atatürk were living today, he would also share this point of view.
3. Hamdullah Suphi Tanriöver declared that when a faith is destroyed and is not replaced by another, disaster results; that the twin faiths necessary as a moral foundation for Turkish youth were nationalism and religion, and that in order to protect the Turkish nation from foreign ideologies, particularly communism, religion should be encouraged.
4. In replying to these statements, Prime Minister Recep Peker said that it was erroneous to believe that religion would combat communism, which had obtained a foothold even in very religious countries such as Spain and Greece, and that the only antidote to communism was nationalism. He declared that the widest possible religious liberty existed in Turkey and that in the past, religion had led only to exploitation of the nation, and any reactionary religious movement at this time would be a great danger to the state.

This question of religious instruction was again brought up some days later at the convention of the Democratic Party in Ankara by a delegate who spoke of it as an urgent national necessity.

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Both these incidents serve to illustrate (1) the existing rift between the official principles of the Turkish Revolution, which are the basis of the political doctrines of both parties, and (2) the increasing desire for the resurgence of religious faith among the very men who claim to have abolished that phase of the past.

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It should be noted that, whereas the schools of the Jewish, Greek and Armenian minorities and those run by the various Catholic orders are free to offer limited courses in religious instruction, the teaching of Islam or the Koran in state schools is specifically forbidden by the law which separated religion and the state. Although there is no provision for the formal education of an Islamic clergy (and the school of theology of the University of Istanbul has now been incorporated into the Faculty of Letters), religious instruction can be given in the mosques.

6. It has been learned that the questions of religious teachings in state schools and the creation of seminaries for the formation of an Islamic clergy were discussed in a secret session of the Executive Council of the Republican People's Party, to which the two above-mentioned deputies had been invited for the purpose of further explanation of their statements made in the Grand National Assembly. Government spokesmen voiced the same fear as Recep Peker in stating that if religious teachings were re-introduced into the state schools, a reaction, not necessarily immediate, but probable in the future, would result, and this would necessitate the amendment of the constitution, a course of action that could not be carried out at present without considerable danger. As there is nothing in the constitution, however, to prevent the establishment of seminaries, and there does exist a Directorate General of Religious Affairs attached to the Prime Ministry, it would appear that there is a possibility of a compromise on the question of establishing seminaries.
7. Another government department, the Directorate General of Religious Foundations (Diyanet), which is in charge of the construction and maintenance of mosques and other real property, and also has a large income from a special tax on real estate, may furnish a part of the necessary funds for the creation of new seminaries. This solution was suggested, in view of the fact that the budget for 1947 has already been voted.
8. It is probable, however, that the government will find a solution in its powers to provide through the Ministry of Public Instruction for religious instruction, provided such instruction remains voluntary and outside of school buildings.

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